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19-15-8  
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U. S. Department of Agriculture  
SLIP COVERS AND CURTAINS FOR THE LIVING ROOM

A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, broadcast Thursday, April 21, 1938, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 93 associate radio stations.

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WALLACE KADDERLY:

And now for the weekly report from the Bureau of Home Economics. Here's Ruth Van Deman a-steppin' up to the microphone. On a fine spring day like this, Ruth, I'm wondering what a home economics lady chooses to talk about.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Somebody else did the choosing for me this time. Right out of the air mail onto my desk fell a letter from Mrs. Young Homemaker who lives on the West Coast. She wants to know everything we know, and then some, about making slip covers and curtains for her new apartment.

By the way, Wallace, I think I introduced you to her last summer - that up-and-coming young person who's taking her housekeeping very seriously and making such intelligent use of scientific information.

KADDERLY:

Yes, I know who you mean. Go ahead, tell us about her.

VAN DEMAN:

Probably you remember about the budget she and her husband made when they first started housekeeping. They're still sticking to it - keeping track of every dollar that comes in and every penny they spend, and what they spend it for. And they still dedicate one evening every month to going over their accounts and balancing the books. No misunderstandings about money are going to lead to rifts in that family.

Now it seems they've struck a great bargain in a used davenport and chair - good furniture all except the covers. They've worn out completely. But they decided the budget wouldn't stand the strain of a professional reupholstering job.

So Mrs. Young Homemaker is going to make slip covers herself. She's already shopped for the material and got samples to try the colors in her room.

But now she's wondering about the "hidden qualities" in the fabrics - the things she can't possibly tell just by looking at them. Will they shrink? Are the colors fast? And so on. She wants me to list the qualities of an ideal slip cover material. Then she'll go out and see how many of those qualities she can find in a material within her price range.

Very sensibly she says that she doesn't want to put all her work onto material that won't wear and look well for several years. She knows of course that when you hire slip covers made the labor generally amounts to far more than the cost of the material itself.

(over)

So I've been talking to various textile experts, including Bess Viemont who wrote our leaflet on slip covers. Here's our composite definition of what we think the perfect slip cover material should be:

First, a close weave and a smooth surface so that dust won't collect on it or sift through to the furniture underneath. If you get a very rough or uneven weave - maybe with long floating yarns making the pattern - it's likely to snag and soon look shabby.

Then we think a good slip cover material should not wrinkle easily, and should have enough body to keep its shape. If slip covers aren't properly cut and fitted, they're going to wrinkle no matter what. But some fabrics almost wrinkle while you're looking at them on the bolt in the store. Slip covers of materials like that remind me of the linen dusters of horse-and-buggy days.

Then we wish it were possible to buy slip cover materials definitely labeled - will not shrink more than 2 percent - or whatever percentage the manufacturer can reasonably guarantee. Some materials now are labeled preshrunk or with words to that effect. But that doesn't mean they won't shrink some more. Those labels are better than none, but they only tell part of the story.

Mrs. Young Homemaker asked me also about sending her material to the laundry to have it shrunken before she makes it up. That's a good idea if the laundry is equipped to steam and refinish it. But nine times out of ten it comes back with a "washed" look and all the crisp new finish gone. And of course unless she knows it's color fast to water as well as to light, it's taking quite a chance to have yards and yards of new material wet before she's had any use from it at all.

On this color question, each year more of the slip cover materials are being labeled color fast and tub fast. Some say unfading. But many more say nothing at all. And even for those that do there are no definite standards as to what color fast, and tub fast, and light fast, and so on mean. There's almost sure to be some change in the color of a fabric of that type with wear. Very strong colors in fact are often better after they've toned down a bit. But it's the same here as with shrinkage, the ideal slip cover material needs a definite label on color fastness.

And it needs to be a fabric that's easy to work with - won't fray badly and be too bulky in the seams.

As for the design - that's a personal matter - whether you like big bunches of gay flowers, or small conventionalized patterns, or checks, or stripes, or plain colors in herringbone weaves. A mixture often shows the soil less than a plain color. And especially if there are children and dogs romping through the house it's better to choose something you don't have to worry about.

When she comes to making her slip covers, I know this particular young woman will box her cushions, and stitch her seams twice, and fit the material until it looks as smooth and sleek as a kitten's ear. And she'll probably put a slide fastener in each cover, so it can be taken off easily for cleaning. Or she may use large snap fasteners or buttons and buttonholes under a placket.



I rather hope she won't try cording all the seams. Contrasting seam bindings and cordings do give a tailor-made look, but they're hard for the amateur to manage on the home sewing machine on a big piece like a davenport cover. If she wants to give a professional touch, I'm suggesting she look for a ready-made cord or a candlewick tape that she can sew on by hand on top of a plain seam.

And she already has Bess Viemont's leaflet on slip covers to show her how to measure and cut and fit her pattern - that's very important.

And for her curtain questions, I'm going to let her find the answers in another bulletin of Miss Viemont's - "Window Curtaining". For I see Wallace Kadderly looking at me in a way that says without words - time's up for today.

KADDERLY:

But we'll be looking for you next Thursday.

And just to check the titles of the bulletins Miss Van Deman spoke of - Slip Covers and Window Curtaining. These are both based on the textile research of the Bureau of Home Economics and free for the asking. If you want them for your household library, write to Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., and ask for Slip Covers or Window Curtaining or both.

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1. The first part of the report is a general introduction to the subject of the study.

2. The second part of the report is a detailed description of the methods used in the study.

3. The third part of the report is a discussion of the results of the study.

4. The fourth part of the report is a conclusion and a list of references.